

Homily **Corpus Christi** - Year C (23.6.19)

When I was reflecting on this feast, after having come back from a holiday, thinking of what to say, do you know the first thing that shot into my head was Bonzo the dog? It was Father Mark's first dog, my dear friend Father Mark. And he was a highly strung dog and he didn't like new people, didn't like meeting new people. And so much so that he used to nip them. So, Father Mark got this idea, and it worked, if any new person came into the house, they were given a handful of dog biscuits and told, when they entered, to go like that instantly [hold dog biscuit high in hand]. And the dog would sit and then the person had to give it one every 30 seconds 'til they were all gone, and then they became best friends.

(Laughter)

But why I liked this image is because I was brought up in the old Latin rite, and really, the church I grew up in, which I loved in many ways, it treated God like Bonzo. And you had to throw biscuits to God to make sure you didn't get bitten, spiritual biscuits. So there were rules, very strict rules. So things like fasting before communion. And when I first started, it was from midnight and then they did reduce it to three hours, which was still quite a strenuous act. And regular confession and so on.

But the thing it did do, besides giving you devotion, because I must admit, when you fasted and went to communion, when you made an effort, the

Eucharist tasted good because you'd disposed yourself to the receptivity of a gift in hunger. It really worked.

But the other side of the coin was it made you minimalistic. I shouldn't really tell you this 'cause you might do it next week, but all the rules told you exactly what the minimum was you could get away with, without sinning. Do you remember? So, coming to mass on Sunday to fulfil your obligation, as long as you got in time for the Gospel and you left after the priest had received communion, you'd been to mass. Do you know the number of people who used to do that was incredible, to get the minimum in.

And we were like that as a family. We did our obligations, but nothing extra, not really. If there was benediction on a Sunday afternoon, "Bye" [waves hand]. I wasn't going. I wanted to play out. And we got benediction every Friday afternoon at the end of the school day anyway, and so I got my benediction there. But yes, we went to some special things, maybe like the Blessed Sacrament procession or the May procession and so on.

But the tremendous thing about the atmosphere pre-Vatican II was this sense of devotion. Devotion is a powerful word, because ascetic practices like fasting make you more devoted. And if you didn't make an effort with a partner, a wife, a child, if you weren't devoted to them, imagine what they would feel or what you would experience in return from someone you wanted love from.

And we've lost that sense of devotion in some ways. And as I've gotten older I've thought, and as these rules disappear, I mean, the fasting for an hour is ridiculous, isn't it? You only have to get up in the morning, shuffle around a bit, and by the time you've got to church, the hour has passed when it gets to communion, so it's minimalism.

But it makes me ask what signs of devotion do I show in my life - Well I do do things, but it should make us ask. Well, do I make any special effort to prepare with reverence for the Eucharist? For example, do I get up early if I'm going to have breakfast and eat or drink long before I go to church to dispose myself to be open to the bread from heaven?

In my life I've gone to Methodist Eucharist, Anglican Eucharist, and I can honestly say it casts light on our own practise, the shock of how sometimes irreverent we are, because the Methodists, who don't believe in the real presence as such, you ought to see how they go to communion when they hold the Eucharist. So gently and reverentially, and the way they receive the bread and the little individual cup, they do it with gentleness and reverence for what they're celebrating. And I've never been to an Anglican Eucharist yet, where I've seen it rushed or badly received and they still kneel, most of them, at an altar rail. Maybe we have lost something of the externals that helped us to be disposed to receiving the Eucharist reverentially.

And of course, the other thing too is, devotion to the Eucharist is the real presence. And here is the advert now, we have Novena and Benediction

coming up starting this Wednesday, ignore the bulletin. It's right in the list of services: Wednesday, 7:30, and I don't know why, but somehow it has then a notice in the bulletin saying, "Begins this Thursday, 7:30." So don't get confused. It's definitely Wednesday.

But again, it's so rare to get that in the church nowadays, and we put it on just once a year, just nine. And it's a wonderful opportunity of deepening one's devotion, not just being constantly focused on eating, but on the inner-self and being devoted to the real presence. And the opportunity to share with others the great sense of the gift that has been given to us.

So I think this feast day, besides traditionally being a feast day focused around the Eucharist, is about asking us afresh to look at our own reverential approach to the Eucharist, in the liturgy, in our prayer life, and in our devotional life, and also in the way we actually receive the Eucharist.